

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
NASHVILLE DIVISION**

JAMES S. BOYD,)
v.)
Plaintiff,) Case No. 3:15-cv-01150
) Judge Campbell / Knowles
NURSE JESSICA ISON and)
COMMISSARY VENDOR,)
Defendants.)

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

This matter is before the Court upon a Motion to Dismiss pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) filed by Defendant Jessica Ison, a jail nurse.¹ Docket No. 12. Defendant has contemporaneously filed a supporting Memorandum of Law. Docket No. 13.

Plaintiff has not responded to the instant Motion.

Plaintiff filed this pro se, in forma pauperis action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, arguing that Defendants violated his constitutional rights by invading his privacy, failing to provide him medical and dental care, and giving him “small portions of inedible food each meal.” Docket No. 1. As relates to his medical care, Plaintiff argues that he has not seen a dentist or received dental treatment beyond 2 Motrin per day for his 3 broken teeth, which “hurt constantly” and

¹ Plaintiff sued the Montgomery County Jail, Nurse Jessica Ison, and an unnamed “Commissary Vendor.” Docket No. 1. Montgomery County Jail was terminated as a party in this action in an Order entered by Judge Campbell on November 5, 2015. Docket No. 3. Defendant Commissary Vendor is not a party to the instant Motion; accordingly, the instant Report and Recommendation relates solely to Plaintiff’s claims against Defendant Ison.

have “absessed [sic] twice” since his arrest and incarceration. *Id.*² Plaintiff additionally avers that he has not been treated by mental health professionals for “insomnia, reaccuring [sic] nightmares, hearing voices + seeing shadows.” *Id.* Plaintiff sues Defendant Ison in her official and individual capacities, and seeks the following relief: “Dental - Teeth extraction - \$50,000; Mental - My issues need to be addressed - \$50,000; Invasion of Privacy - No female deputies present when I shower; Denied visitation with daughter - need visitation - \$20,000; Inadequate, inedible food - more food; Commissary selling products marked “not for resale” - \$50,000.” *Id.* Plaintiff also notes that he is seeking “\$20,000 in damages for emotional distress, intimidation and violation of [his] civil rights.” *Id.*

For the reasons discussed below, the undersigned recommends that Defendant’s Motion to Dismiss (Docket No. 12) be GRANTED, that Plaintiff’s claims against Defendant Ison be DISMISSED, and that Defendant Ison be TERMINATED as a party in this action.

II. Law and Analysis

A. Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6)

Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) provides that a claim may be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. In order to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, a complaint must contain either direct or inferential allegations respecting all material elements to sustain a recovery under some viable legal theory. *Mezibov v. Allen*, 411 F.3d 712, 716 (6th Cir. 2005). Conclusory allegations or legal conclusions masquerading as factual allegations will not suffice. *Id.* A complaint containing a statement of facts that merely creates a

² Other than naming her as a party, Plaintiff does not mention Nurse Ison in his Complaint.

suspicion of a legally cognizable right of action is insufficient. *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 127 S.Ct. 1955, 1965 (2007). The “[f]actual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level”; they must “state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Id.* At 1965, 1974. *See also, Ass’n of Cleveland Fire Fighters v. City of Cleveland*, 502 F.3d 545, 548 (6th Cir. 2007).

Moreover, the United States Supreme Court has recently addressed the appropriate standard that must be applied in considering a Motion to Dismiss for failure to state a claim. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662 (2009). The *Iqbal* Court stated in part as follows:

Two working principles underlie our decision in *Twombly*. First, the tenet that a court must accept as true all of the allegations contained in a complaint is inapplicable to legal conclusions. Threadbare recitals of the elements of the cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice Rule 8 marks a notable and generous departure from the hyper-technical, code-pleading regime of a prior era, but it does not unlock the doors of discovery for plaintiff armed with nothing more than conclusions. Second, only a complaint that states a plausible claim for relief survives a motion to dismiss Determining whether a complaint states a plausible claim for relief will, as the Court of Appeals observed, be a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense. . . . But where the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged - but it has not “show[n]” - “that the pleader is entitled to relief.”

556 U.S. at 678-79 (citations omitted).

B. 42 U.S.C. § 1983

1. Generally

Plaintiff alleges violations of his Eighth Amendment rights pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

See Docket No. 1. Section 1983 provides, in part, that:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress...

Thus, in order to state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States, and must show that the alleged deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48, 108 S. Ct. 2250, 2254-55 (1988), *citing Parratt v. Taylor*, 451 U.S. 527, 535, 101 S. Ct. 1908, 1913, 68 L. Ed. 2d 420 (1981) (overruled in part on other grounds, *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 330-331, 106 S. Ct. 662, 88 L. Ed. 2d 662 (1986)); *Flagg Bros., Inc. v. Brooks*, 436 U.S. 149, 155, 98 S. Ct. 1729, 1733, 56 L. Ed. 2d 185 (1978). The traditional definition of acting under color of state law requires that the defendant in a § 1983 action have exercised power “possessed by virtue of state law and made possible only because the wrongdoer is clothed with the authority of state law.” *Id.* at 49, 108 S. Ct. 2255, *quoting United States v. Classic*, 313 U.S. 299, 326, 61 S. Ct. 1031, 1043, 85 L. Ed. 1368 (1941).

2. Eighth Amendment

a. Generally

The Eighth Amendment provides that:

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

U.S. Const. amend. VIII.

The United States Supreme Court has held that the constitutional prohibition of “cruel

and unusual punishments” forbids punishments that are incompatible with “the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society,” or which “involve the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain.” *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 102-03, 97 S. Ct. 285, 290, 50 L. Ed. 2d 251 (1976) (citations omitted).

In order to establish an Eighth Amendment claim, an inmate must satisfy a two-prong test: (1) the deprivation alleged must be objectively serious; and (2) the official responsible for the deprivation must have exhibited deliberate indifference to the inmate’s health or safety. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834, 114 S. Ct. 1970, 1977, 128 L. Ed. 2d 811 (1994).

b. Deliberate Indifference To Serious Medical Needs

The State has a constitutional obligation, under the Eighth Amendment, to provide adequate medical care to those whom it has incarcerated. *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 104, 97 S. Ct. at 291.

“[D]eliberate indifference to serious medical needs of prisoners constitutes the ‘unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain’ proscribed by the Eighth Amendment.” *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 104. This is true “whether the indifference is manifested by prison doctors in their response to the prisoner’s needs or by prison guards in intentionally denying or delaying access to medical care or intentionally interfering with the treatment once prescribed.” *Id.* at 104-05.

Not every prisoner’s allegation of inadequate medical treatment, however, is a violation of the Eighth Amendment. *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 105. For instance, courts have held that the accidental, inadvertent, or negligent failure to provide adequate medical care does not state such a claim. *Id.* at 105-06 (citations omitted).

Pursuant to Supreme Court precedent, the Sixth Circuit held, in *Hunt v. Reynolds*, that

Eighth Amendment deliberate indifference claims must contain both an objective component, “that [plaintiff’s] medical needs were sufficiently serious,” and a subjective component, “that the defendant state officials were deliberately indifferent to the plaintiff’s needs.” 974 F.2d 734, 735 (6th Cir. 1992) (citations omitted).

In order to satisfy the objective requirement, the Supreme Court requires that an inmate demonstrate evidence of a current harm or evidence of a medical complaint or condition of confinement that “is sure or very likely to cause serious illness and needless suffering.” *Helling v. McKinney*, 509 U.S. 25, 33, 113 S. Ct. 2475, 2480, 125 L. Ed. 2d 22 (1993). Under the Eighth Amendment, inmate plaintiffs, must allege, at the very least, unnecessary pain or suffering resulting from prison officials’ deliberate indifference. *Id.* (prisoner alleging that he suffered pain and mental anguish from delay in medical care states a valid Eighth Amendment claim).

As for the subjective element, the Sixth Circuit has held that “a determination of deliberate indifference does not require proof of intent to harm.” *Weeks v. Chaboudy*, 984 F.2d 185, 187 (6th Cir. 1993). There must, however, be a showing of deliberate indifference to an inmate’s serious medical needs. *Molton v. City of Cleveland*, 839 F.2d 240, 243 (6th Cir. 1988) (*citing Westlake v. Lucas*, 537 F. 2d 857, 860 n. 3 (6th Cir. 1976)). In fact, “[k]nowledge of the asserted serious needs or of circumstances clearly indicating the existence of such needs, is essential to a finding of deliberate indifference.” *Horn v. Madison County Fiscal Court*, 22 F.3d 653, 660 (6th Cir. 1994) (citations omitted). The inquiry, therefore, according to the Sixth Circuit, is “[w]as this individual prison official aware of the risk to the inmate’s health and deliberately indifferent to it?” *Thaddeus-X*, 175 F.3d at 402 (*citing Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 837, 844, 114 S. Ct. 1970, 1979, 1982-83, 128 L. Ed. 2d 811 (1994)).

C. The Case at Bar

As noted, Plaintiff sues Defendant Ison in her official and individual capacities. Docket No. 1.

1. Official Capacity Claims

In complaints alleging federal civil rights violations under § 1983, “[a]n official capacity claim filed against a public employee is equivalent to a lawsuit directed against the public entity which that agent represents.” *Claybrook v. Birchwell*, 199 F.3d 350, 355 n.4 (6th Cir. 2000) (citing *Kentucky v. Graham*, 473 U.S. 159, 165 (1985)). *See also, Frost v. Hawkins County Bd. of Educ.*, 851 F.2d 822, 827 (6th Cir. 1988). As such, when a public employee is sued in his or her official capacity, the claims are essentially made against the public entity. *Id.*

Defendant is an employee of Correct Care Solutions, a private company that contracts with the State to provide medical services to inmates. A private entity that contracts with the State to perform a traditional state function (such provide medical services to inmates) acts under color of state law and may be sued under § 1983. *Hicks v. Frey*, 992 F.2d 1450, 1458 (6th Cir. 1993); *Street v. Corrections Corp. of America*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996).

Section 1983, however, does not permit the imposition of liability based upon *respondeat superior*. *Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981). In order for Defendant to be held liable, Plaintiff must plead allegations, *inter alia*, that an “official policy or custom was adopted by the official makers of policy with ‘deliberate indifference’ towards the constitutional rights of persons affected by the policy or custom.” *City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378, 387-88 (1989). *See also, Monell v. Dept. of Soc. Serv.*, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91 (1978) (In order to find a governmental entity liable, Plaintiff must establish that (1) he / she suffered a

deprivation of a constitutionally protected interest, and (2) the deprivation was caused by an official policy, custom, or usage of the local governmental entity.).

Plaintiff in the case at bar does not contend that any official CCS policy, practice, or custom caused the alleged deprivation of his rights. Because Plaintiff does not allege, much less establish, that the alleged violations of his rights were caused by an official CCS policy, custom, or usage, he cannot sustain his official capacity claim against Defendant.

2. Individual Capacity Claims

As discussed above, § 1983 does not provide for the imposition of liability based upon a theory of *respondeat superior*. *Monell v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 436 U.S. 658, 691-94 (1978). In order to establish individual liability under § 1983, therefore, Plaintiff must demonstrate that Defendant either directly participated in the activity that allegedly violated his Constitutional rights, or personally authorized, approved, or acquiesced in such activity. *See, e.g., Bellamy v. Bradley*, 729 F.2d 416, 421 (6th Cir. 1984); *Dunn v. State of Tennessee*, 697 F.2d 121, 128 (6th Cir. 1983); *Hays v. Jefferson County*, 668 F.2d 869 (6th Cir. 1980). Plaintiff must allege “a causal connection between the misconduct complained of and the official sued” (*Dunn*, 697 F.2d at 128), and must present affirmative evidence that Defendant violated his rights; conclusory allegations are not enough (*see Street v. J.C. Bradford & Co.*, 886 F.2d 1472, 1479 (6th Cir. 1989)). *See also, Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 257; *Nix v. O'Malley*, 160 F.3d 343, 347 (6th Cir. 1998); *Lujan v. National Wildlife Fed'n*, 497 U.S. 871, 888, 110 S. Ct. 3177, 3188, 111 L. Ed. 2d 695 (1990); *McDonald v. Union Camp Corp.*, 898 F.2d 1155, 1162 (6th Cir. 1990).

Other than naming Defendant as a party to be sued, Plaintiff has not levied any allegations whatsoever against Defendant Ison specifically. As such, Plaintiff’s Complaint fails

to sufficiently allege that Defendant Ison has either personally been involved in, or personally authorized, approved, or acquiesced to the allegedly violative conduct of which Plaintiff complains. Accordingly, Plaintiff cannot sustain his individual capacity claims against Defendant.

IV. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, the undersigned recommends that Defendant's Motion to Dismiss (Docket No. 12) be GRANTED, that Plaintiff's claims against Defendant Ison be DISMISSED, and that Defendant Ison be TERMINATED as a party in this action.

Under Rule 72(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, any party has fourteen (14) days after service of this Report and Recommendation in which to file any written objections to this Recommendation with the District Court. Any party opposing said objections shall have fourteen (14) days after service of any objections filed to this Report in which to file any response to said objections. Failure to file specific objections within fourteen (14) days of service of this Report and Recommendation can constitute a waiver of further appeal of this Recommendation. *See Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140, 106 S.Ct. 466, 88 L. Ed. 2d 435 (1985), *reh'g denied*, 474 U.S. 1111 (1986); 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72.

/s/ E. Clifton Knowles
E. CLIFTON KNOWLES
United States Magistrate Judge